

The U.S. exit strategy from Iraq has always been to install a stable, friendly Iraqi government whose oil revenues would give it financial independence and withdraw the bulk of the force that had overthrown Saddam's regime. But the scale of the challenge of remaking Iraq forced Washington to adapt its plans. When U.S. viceroy Paul Bremer arrived to take the reins from the hapless Jay Garner he chose to keep political authority in U.S. hands rather than betting prematurely on any Iraqi group. To the chagrin of most of Iraq's many political factions, Bremer has put talk of a transitional government in the deep freeze, and instead plans to draw Iraqis into a much slower process of consultation over a new constitution. That, of course, leaves the occupation authority without an Iraqi face, which further inflames nationalist passions—but managing an occupation mission such as Iraq invariably throws up mostly lesser-evil choices.

It was clear from the moment Bremer took over that the process of achieving the Bush administration's political objectives in post-Saddam Iraq might take years of patient nation-building. But what has become equally clear, in recent weeks, is that it may also require winning a second war, of counterinsurgency.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. GINGREY). The Chair reminds all Members to address their remarks to the Chair.

WASTE, FRAUD AND ABUSE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. GARRETT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GARRETT of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about our efforts towards reducing waste, fraud and abuse in the Federal Government. It is a problem that has been plaguing the American taxpayers for far too long. With so little accountability on the Federal level, our government has grown like an unchecked cancer, basically ransacking and pick-pocketing the taxpayers pocket, wasting taxpayer dollars so the Federal Government does not have the dollars it needs to get the job done.

How does this happen? It happens by disregarding erroneous tax returns; by Medicare making thousands of overpayments, refusing to improve their bookkeeping system; in effect having the government waste, fraud and abuse occurring so that we do not have the taxpayer dollars necessary in those areas we want to have it.

Before I begin, allow me to address some specific areas that are of interest to me so we can begin the process to start to reform the Federal Government to address the issue of the deficit and hopefully bring our budget back in line to balance.

Go back, if you will, and imagine if the Federal Government was actually able to account for that \$17.3 billion back in 2001 or that \$20 billion in overpayments that they made in that same year. If we were able to do that, we

would be able to bring our Federal deficit that year within eight points better than we did that year. Eight points, eight percent, it is not that much, but at least it is a step in the right direction.

Today we have already heard of the creation of a new organization of dedicated freshmen members of Washington's Waste Watchers. This is a group that is dedicated to literally cut the fat to address the issue of waste, fraud and abuse, to try to reverse the years of neglect on the Federal level when it comes to Federal spending.

When I go back to the folks back in the 5th Congressional District in New Jersey where I represent, I hear countless times from those people of how hard it is to send in their tax dollars from their hard-earned paychecks that they make each week, to send it down to Washington only to hear all the stories in the press of how we spend the money down here. When they hear that money is being misspent, wasted, their response is shock and disappointment.

Mr. Speaker, Americans did not send us to Washington just to spend their money. They sent us here to spend their money in the right way, not to waste their money, not to abuse their money, not to lose their money, but to spend it to help those needed recipients, as we intended to.

It is time that we in Congress start putting some pressure on those Federal agencies to get their books in order, to crack down on fraud and abuse, to cut the waste.

I sit on the Committee on the Budget, and we had the Inspector General folks from the Department of Education come in, and they spoke of improper loan forgiveness for false death and disability claims and questionable handling of student loan funds. What this means is that there is less dollars to go into the classroom for the textbooks and overcrowded classrooms because we sent the Federal dollars we want to there.

But this is just one example. There are so many more that we are going to hear as we go on in this program.

Examples on the Medicare program, which pays as much as eight times the cost of other Federal agencies for drugs and programs, Medicare that when you compare it to programs like the VA, the VA spends \$130 for a wheelchair, Medicare \$571. Medicare versus the VA, VA spends 700 bucks for a bed. Medicare spends around 1,700 bucks, a 230 percent increase for the same program. Medicare from 1996 to 2002 spent \$83 billion in improper payments.

We also had some testimony from some other people, people from the Inspector General's office in the Department of Health and Human Services. They told us that upwards to 5 percent or more of all funding that goes into Medicare is misused and wasted. This House just voted on a \$400 billion package for prescription drugs. Five percent of \$400 billion comes to a potential \$20 billion of more waste, fraud and abuse.

How do we avoid this problem in that area? There is a couple of recommendations. One is to have accounting mechanisms in place for all the money that is spent. It is not there. Secondly is to have verification mechanisms for the employees and have those employees be held responsible and accountable and, thirdly, have more resources for the Inspector Generals to conduct the audits to find that waste, fraud and abuse that we are talking about here. That is just another example that our constituents back home hear about of waste, fraud and abuse on the Federal level.

Mr. Speaker, I remind my colleagues that the American people did not send us to Washington, the American people did not elect us to be Members of Congress to spend their money ineffectively. They sent us here to make sure that the money is spent efficiently and effectively. They sent us here to make sure that there is not that waste, fraud and abuse.

U.S. FOREIGN POLICY AND POST- WAR IRAQ

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. SCOTT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SCOTT of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, as one of the cochair of the Democratic Study Group on National Security, along with the gentleman from California (Mr. SCHIFF) and the gentleman from New York (Mr. ISRAEL), I am very delighted to stand on the floor this evening to talk about American foreign policy and post-war Iraq.

I certainly want to extend appreciation to our leader, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI), for having the foresight and vision to establish our Democratic Study Group on National Security.

I supported the President's decision to go to war against Iraq and remove Saddam Hussein from power. I am also pleased that this regime can no longer victimize the Iraqi people. The United States military has done very well, a superb job, and I am very proud of our soldiers, our sailors, our airmen, but we cannot let go of Iraq just yet.

As the world's only remaining superpower, we must recommit ourselves to peace, diplomacy and nation building now that the war is winding down.

The United States of America is a strong Nation, with the strongest military in the world, but with that force must exist a strong diplomatic strategy. The situation in Iraq teaches us that we cannot simply overwhelm a regime with force and then disengage from the area. If we do not back our strength of action with strength of diplomacy, then we will fail in our goal to provide a rebuilt, free democracy in Iraq.

I am concerned that there is a lot more that still needs to be done to make Iraq a safe and secure country, more than the United States can